
Intermixing German and Russian in Lou Andreas-Salomé's Travelogue *Russland mit Rainer* and Katja Petrowskaja's Autobiographical Narrative *Vielleicht Esther*

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Lou Andreas-Salomé's 1900 travelogue, *Russland mit Rainer* ("Russia with Rainer"), and Katja Petrowskaja's autobiographical narrative *Vielleicht Esther* ("Maybe Esther," 2014) were written more than a hundred years apart, yet they share strikingly common linguistic ground.¹ Both works are written in German, and both include numerous switches into Russian. A comparison of the functions of this intermixing of languages in the two texts reveals that the switches are charged with deep emotion. For the two writers, Russian was the language of childhood. Consequently, they employ transitions in language to negotiate the linguistic identities of their first-person narrators. However, there are also important differences. Petrowskaja's frequent change of languages is motivated in part by her attempts to comprehend her family's past trauma—as victims of German as well as Russian violence. Considered together, these works help illuminate the intimate connection between identity and language. In a metaliterary context, scrutiny of these texts leads to a recognition of identity *between* languages.

The momentous events of the twentieth century lie in the interval between the creation of the two narratives, a time "caught between the most extravagant demand for freedom and the most massive oppression of this same freedom human beings have ever known" (Kristeva 259). To mention an example of the ongoing aftermath of this tumult, while on a trip from Germany to her childhood city of Kiev, Petrowskaja discovers that three of her grandparents were Jewish and that several relatives died in the Holocaust. In the narrator's words, incidents happened "die ich nicht haben und nicht deuten konnte" "that I could not comprehend" (136). This discovery contributes to her complex emotional relationship with both the German and Russian languages. She shifts back and forth between them, as if certain nuances of her family's story could not be articulated in only one of the two. In comparing Petrowskaja's linguistic switching to that of Lou Andreas-Salomé, one finds that Andreas-Salomé's relationship to German and Russian and the textual shifts between them likewise arouse powerful impulses. However, her alterations are dramatic in a more interior way, as contributions to the author's *Selbstfindung*, her "self-discovery," during her trip to Russia with the

poet Rainer Maria Rilke (Decker 234). Of the two writers, only Petrowskaja could know the appalling history of the twentieth century. Therefore, it is to be expected that Andreas-Salomé's and Petrowskaja's relationships to German and to Russian would evoke emotions to different degrees and in different contextual frameworks.

Lou Andreas-Salomé was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1861, the daughter of a Russian general of Huguenot-French origin and a German-Danish mother. Andreas-Salomé was thus Russian and grew up as "Ljola." Since her father was granted nobility by the czar, she was raised "among the European-oriented elite at [his] court" (Eigler 12). She spoke Russian, German, and French fluently. Accompanied by her mother, she moved to Switzerland in 1879 as a so-called *Bildungsemigrantin* ("emigrant for reasons of education") to study the history of religion (Decker 47). At the time, Zürich's university was one of the first to admit women. Later, after her mother had returned to Russia, Andreas-Salomé moved to Germany, shed the name Ljola, and became Lou. Independent-minded, very intelligent, of regal appearance, and with the term "Excellency" in her Russian passport (Decker 91), Andreas-Salomé easily became a part of intellectual circles. Friedrich Nietzsche was one of the best known of her associates, and she became one of the philosopher's most important friends during the latter part of his life. However, she rejected marriage proposals from Nietzsche to wed Friedrich Carl Andreas, who rose to prominence as a professor of Oriental Studies. Andreas and Salomé subsequently settled in Göttingen. Kerstin Decker notes the number and variety of languages Andreas spoke: "Die Grenzen meiner Sprache sind die Grenzen meiner Welt? Für Friedrich Carl Andreas müsste man den berühmten Verdacht Wittgensteins so präzisieren: Die Grenzen meiner Welt sind die Grenzen der Sprachen der Erde!" 'Are the limits of my language indeed the limits of my world? For Friedrich Carl Andreas one should put Wittgenstein's famous suspicion more precisely as: The limits of my world are the limits of the planet's languages!' (133).

Being multilingual and always being a part of multilingual households were formative influences on Andreas-Salomé's sense of identity and on her writing. In her early twenties she started a writing career in German with a novel called *Im Kampf um Gott* ("A Struggle for God," 1885) which Kerstin Decker lambastes as "Courths-Mahler nach einer Überdosis Philosophie" 'Courths-Mahler² after an overdose of philosophy' (120). However, some of the works that follow, especially her essays, are less conventionally conceived. Decker finds that these stylistically complex works exhibit nothing short of "brilliance" (121). Among them is the travelogue about her trip to Russia in 1900, which she called *Russland mit Rainer*. In this work, she crosses borders not only geographically, but also linguistically and manages,

in the words of Gisela Brinker-Gabler, “to posit a subject who is capable of generating transformations” (138).

Decker notes that by then, Andreas-Salomé had acknowledged the advice offered to her by Nietzsche that language must live (76). Nietzsche, among other subjects, penned a series of fragments devoted to the topic of stylistics. He directed some of his thoughts specifically to Lou Andreas-Salomé. In the multi-volume series *Fragmente* (“Fragments”) his *Tautenburger Aufzeichnungen für Lou von Salomé*, 1882 (“Tautenburg Notes for Lou von Salomé”), apply his concept of *Gebärde* or “gesture” to writing. Whereas in his earlier work *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, 1878 (“Human, All too Human”), Nietzsche discussed the interconnection of physical gesture and spoken/heard language (*Gebärde und Sprache*), his notes to Andreas-Salomé indicate that language which is written and read is also invested with an abundance of specific gestures: “Der Reichthum an Leben verräth sich durch den Reichthum an Gebärden. Man muss Alles, Länge und Kürze der Sätze, die Interpunktionen, die Wahl der Worte, die Pausen, die Reihenfolge der Argumente—als Gebärden empfinden lernen.” “The richness of life reveals itself through the richness of gestures. One must learn to experience everything in a sentence—length and shortness, punctuation, choice of words, breaks, the sequence of arguments—as gestures.” In keeping with Nietzsche’s assertion that stylistic elements evoke a richness of experience far greater than mere words on a page, Andreas-Salomé’s linguistic switching in *Russland mit Rainer* contributes another example to Nietzsche’s inventory of gestures.

The 1900 trip to Russia was her second visit since leaving her home country to study abroad. Accompanying her was Rainer Maria Rilke, her lover at the time. Decker maintains that Andreas-Salomé made the three-month journey as a test to her memory, that is, to rediscover “ihre Heimat und damit wohl auch die eigene Frühe” ‘her home and with it probably also her childhood’ (234). As Stéphane Michaud points out, the author’s frequent shifts from German to Russian in her journal about this trip function as an intercultural migration. She is reclaiming the country where she was born and raised. While traveling from Kiev to the river Volga and on the river northwards to the Gulf of Finland, Andreas-Salomé works through her memory of Russia and, as Michaud stresses, emotionally refuses to allow a separation between mother tongue and second language. According to Michaud, Russian is for Andreas-Salomé “le chiffre d’une plénitude originelle, d’une sagesse primitive” ‘the symbol for an original fullness, of a primitive wisdom’ (193). The language helps her to negotiate her identity or, as Michaud puts it, Russian allows “la voyageuse, et le lecteur avec elle, à la rencontre d’eux-mêmes” ‘the traveler and the reader, along with her, to meet themselves’ (201).

The brief 145-page text contains 319 instances of switches from

German into Russian. They are mainly names of people whom she and Rilke met in Russia and those of painters and paintings they saw in galleries in Moscow and St. Petersburg. However, idioms are also included, as well as Russian names for specific foods, household items, architectural details, and expressions that have no precise one-word translations in German. An example is *rpamora* (“the ability to read and write,” 40). These frequent instances of intermixing languages and of shifting between the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets give the text the appearance of geographic border areas where linguistic territories overlap. Two languages meet and imbue themselves with the sound and structure of the other, as the people mentioned in the travelogue adopt the expressions that best fit their communication needs.

The Russian word most frequently used in Andreas-Salomé’s travel account is the religious and spiritual term *икона* (“icon,” 42) because she believed that the German translation, *Ikone*, would not evoke the same complex emotional associations as does the Russian word. One of these associations is symbolic, as Brigitte Kronauer emphasizes in her introduction to the text’s first edition, “Die Ikone als Heimat und umgekehrt” “The Icon as Home and Vice Versa” (22). There are so many instances of intermixing German and Russian that the text appears to be a jumble. The ritualistic frequency of the practice adds a spiritual component to Andreas-Salomé’s language, allowing the reader to understand her nostalgia for the country where she was reared.

As Kronauer indicates, Andreas-Salomé employs an arbitrary writing style (41). Most of the Russian words and expressions in the text are in Cyrillic letters. However, three are spelled in Latin. One example is *Kobsar* (59), a blind Ukrainian singer who, accompanied by a guide, wanders from village to village to present his songs about national heroes. Playing with different alphabets enhances the author’s creativity during a time when intermixing languages was still considered to be a sign of *Sprach-verlumpung* or “the deterioration of language,” (Michaud 195). Later, in Andreas-Salomé’s autobiography *Lebensrückblick*, 1968 (“Looking Back”), four Russian expressions are spelled with the Latin alphabet, for instance, “*Nagaike*” (“whip,” 73). For Andreas-Salomé this word invokes direct association and memory and thus conveys more fear than the German term *Peitsche* would. In contrast to her travelogue, *Lebensrückblick* was written with the intention of publication, and it is probable that the author transferred the Russian expressions into the Latin alphabet to facilitate a smooth, easily readable flow. Although it removes some of the fascinating coarseness of her autobiography’s textual fabric, the inclusion of particles in Latin characters like *Nagaike*, together with neologisms like *Verrussung* (“Russianizing,” 66) still impel the reader to mentally cross a border. In other words, by following Nietzsche’s instruction in his notes to Andreas-Salomé to “mit vielen Augen zugleich auf einen

Gegenstand sehen” ‘look with many eyes at once at an object,’ she includes different languages among the perspectives whence she looks at all things.

In Andreas-Salomé’s writing, as with travel across borders, ordinary things can hold a significance more profound than their common identity. Objects can assume an estranged meaning when experienced in a new context. Culturally specific items such as *Nagaïka* in the memoir *Lebensrückblick* or the many Russian references in the travelogue *Russland mit Rainer* stand out from their surrounding narrative contexts similarly to how an ordinary object may appear in a foreign cultural setting.

What Petrowskaja has in common with Ljola/Lou is that she was, as Decker puts it, “eine Russin und doch keine Russin” ‘a Russian and not a Russian after all’ (127). She was born and grew up in the Soviet Union as a native Russian speaker, married a German, and moved to Germany after the Soviet Union’s collapse. *Vielleicht Esther* contains nineteen instances of switching into Russian. In this work, the first-person narrator embarks upon the creation of a family tree via interviews, research on the Internet, and trips eastward, including to her hometown of Kiev. Among the many functions of Russian and other languages in this text, one stands out in particular: linguistic shifts help to contend with heartbreak over conspicuously missing branches of the family tree. These gaps are due to the Holocaust as well as to Stalinist anti-Semitism. Russian (alongside Polish, Yiddish, and other languages) helps the author cope with these lacunae. The integration of Russian words (three are spelled in Cyrillic and sixteen in Latin letters) gives Petrowskaja’s text a deeper dramatic quality than that of Lou Andreas-Salomé’s travelogue, which does not address tumultuous multiethnic cultural history.

Because Petrowskaja discovers her family’s mainly Jewish roots during her trip and must deal with issues of anti-Semitism and genocide, her text shows a unique feature that can best be conceptualized using Mikhail Bakhtin’s thoughts regarding the chain of speech communication. According to the Russian critic, an utterance is an event in space and time “related not only to preceding, but also to subsequent links in the chain” (94). Consequentially, a constitutive marker of the utterance is “its quality of being directed to someone, its *addressivity*” (95). For instance, when Petrowskaja’s narrator states during her stay in Poland that speaking German gives her the feeling of being *getarnt* (“camouflaged,” 116), it means that she feels relief not to be recognized as an “other”—a Russian perhaps. However, by telling the primarily German readership of *Vielleicht Esther* that speaking German is at times a form of camouflage, she must consider what Bakhtin calls “possible responsive reactions” (94), including either xenophobia or the assurance that there is no need to worry about such hatred. As Bakhtin avers, and as it certainly applies to Petrowskaja’s use of the word *getarnt*, the utterance is

“actually created” for the sake of these reactions (94). By comparison, the quality that Bakhtin calls *addressivity* is much stronger in the novel than it is in Andreas-Salomé’s text. To again apply Nietzsche’s concept, Petrowskaja employs a more prominent and elaborate gesture.

Nevertheless, degrees of addressivity can also be found in *Russland mit Rainer*. As Kronauer correctly notes, the travelogue is “eine Art innere Diskussion” ‘a kind of inner discussion’ about Russia (12). Andreas-Salomé argues with herself in this text. In considering what Russia means for her, she abruptly alternates between what Kronauer describes as “hymnisches Sprechen” ‘hymnical speaking’ (13) and “Kälte und bildhafte Schnoddrigkeit” ‘coldness and picturesque impunity’ (13). On the one hand, Russia means “das Ewige und Einfache, aus dem das Leben quillt, das Empfangen desselben aus unmittelbaren Quellen” ‘[the] eternal and elementary from which life springs, [the act of] receiving life from immediate sources’ (93). The sentiment is represented, for example, by the deep religiosity of most Russians whom she meets, especially in the villages and in Russian Orthodox churches. Listening to these people overwhelms her emotionally and reconnects her pleasantly to her childhood: “Es sind Kinderaugen, die man . . . aufschlägt” ‘there are children’s eyes that you open’ (92). On the other hand, the author condemns herself harshly for this emotional outburst and praises Western rationality and “intellektuelle Einsicht” ‘intellectual insight’ (126). From that Western viewpoint, the Russian religiosity and the encountered childlike simplicity reveal nothing but backwardness, and she scolds herself for being moved by it. She surmises that going inward and reconnecting with the God of her Russian childhood is not a solution. At one point she reflects: “wir erkennen nur so viel und so weit, als wir im Stande sind, uns von uns selber zu entfernen, zu uns selbst Distanz zu gewinnen” ‘we only see so much and so far as we are able to step away from ourselves and gain distance’ (127). She tries to gain this distance while reminding herself of what she has learned from Western thought, in the Enlightenment tradition, and from Nietzsche. In this inner discussion, the Russian language, represented by *икона* (“icon,” 42) stands for the first voice in this dialogue. German stands for the second voice. Citing Bakhtin’s thoughts on speech communication, Homi Bhabha argues that “the allusion to another’s utterance produces a dialogical turn, a moment of indeterminacy in the act of ‘addressivity’ (Bakhtin’s concept) that gives rise within the chain of speech communion to ‘unmediated responsive reactions and dialogic reverberations’” (188). This double movement in the chain of the utterance is clear in the many instances when Andreas-Salomé argues with herself. As it happens, the dialogical twists with their multifaceted movements resemble a duel between the Russian and German languages—an open-ended battle that gives the text intercultural depth and stylistic

complexity.

Turning once more to *Vielleicht Esther*, two examples of intermixing German and Russian are particularly important. While visiting her parents in Kiev, the first-person narrator tries to reconstruct the 1941 death of her Jewish great-grandmother during the German occupation. Walking around at Babi Yar, the renowned memorial to the massacres of that year, she has to combine empirical and imaginary information to determine what happened to Esther, as she calls her great-grandmother. In this process, the Russian word *żyд* (214) plays an important role. The narrator surely knows that the German military posted signs all throughout Kiev ordering Jewish citizens to gather at a certain street corner at 8:00 a.m. on September 29, 1941. Although Esther could hardly walk, she slowly moved in that direction because she trusted the German soldiers more than the Russians. However, how could that be? Bewildered, the narrator states that “und weder die Friedhöfe noch das abwertende Wort *żyд* auf den russischen Plakaten haben sie beunruhigt” ‘and neither the cemeteries nor the pejorative word *żyд* on the Russian posters worried her’ (214). The narrator assumes that “vielleicht war es die leichte Schattierung der polnischen und der westukrainischen Sprache, in der man für Juden kein anderes Wort hat als *żyд*, das im Russischen so kränkend klingt” ‘perhaps it was the slight tinge of the Polish and West Ukrainian languages, which have no word for Jew other than *żyд*, that sounds so insulting in Russian’ (214). Clearly, the Russian word *żyд* confronted Esther with ethnic stereotypes tied to very negative notions of the Jew in the region. Abhorring the term more than the German soldiers who had put up the posters, she walked straight to her death.

A second significant example of switching into Russian in Petrowskaja’s text also concerns a relative’s violent death. It includes the frightful Russian words *Lubjanka* (“Lubyanka”) and *Organy* and is tied to the narrator’s research concerning her great-uncle Judas Stern, who was executed in Moscow in 1932. Searching for files that would explain his death sentence, the narrator states that “mir reichte schon die Vorstellung, ins Archiv der Lubjanka gehen zu müssen, um von einer Urankst überwältigt zu werden” ‘to imagine having to go to the archives of the Lubyanka was already enough for me to be overwhelmed by a primordial fear’ (149). The name Lubyanka stands for one of the most oppressive totalitarian machines of the last century, and it terrorizes the narrator.³ To explain this feeling, she intermixes German and Russian, using the word *Organy*:

Whenever I thought about Lubyanka, the prison and torture center where, among others, Judas Stern disappeared, I thought about human organs. We always called this authorities *Organy*. We would say of someone “He works in the internal organs.” Such thoughts

show how the power of the authorities got inside of us. One simply said, “He works in the organs,” as if some organism existed that had swallowed us all.⁴

“The authorities” refers to the KGB and indicates the totalitarian grip it had on the Soviet Union. In Andreas-Salomé’s time, the secret police of the Czar had caused widespread fear, but the writer and her family members did not have to suffer at its hands. Therefore, unlike Petrowskaja’s narrator, Andreas-Salomé can embrace her Russian childhood nostalgically without hesitation. Petrowskaja’s narrator proceeds to describe her fear: “Seit meiner Kindheit habe ich mir diese Organe vorgestellt, riesige dunkle Eingeweide, in denen manche Menschen arbeiten, und wenn man dort eintritt, wird man bei lebendigem Leib verdaut, denn das ist die Funktion der Organe” ‘Since my childhood, I pictured those organs, huge dark bowels, with which some people work; if you go inside them, they digest you alive, because this is the function of organs’ (149).

Judas Stern was executed for a 1932 assassination attempt on a German diplomat. Petrowskaja underscores the inauspicious timelines of a Jewish assassin attempting a body blow to the geopolitical corpus of the time:

My great-uncle aimed his weapon at the solar plexus of his era. He, a Soviet assassin named Judas Stern, shot at a German diplomat in Moscow a week before the Reich’s presidential elections. It was the last year before Hitler [rose to power in Germany] and the first year of the famine in the Soviet Union—two countries that, once allied, drove each other in the direction of madness. It was at this point that my Stern took his shot.⁵

The Soviet prosecutor claimed during her great-uncle’s trial that a Polish terror organization was behind his violent act (161). However, to the narrator researching the files, it seems that the Soviet Union’s secret police was behind it. “The authorities” had ordered Stern to shoot the diplomat and had executed Stern later in an effort to eliminate witnesses. She quotes the German ambassador to Russia at the time, who spoke of “Schuldzuweisungen an Polen . . . , die durch die sowjetische Presse flackerten und von deutschen kommunistischen Zeitungen übernommen wurden” ‘recriminations against Poland that fluttered through the Soviet press and were repeated by German communist newspapers’ (154). However, Petrowskaja’s narrator reconstructs the history thus:

“Pilsudski hired the assassin Stern,” appeared in the *Red Flag* without any proof, and von Dirksen asked the correspondents from German newspapers to refrain, under any circumstances, from mentioning Poland as a possible source of the assassination attempt. But that was precisely what seemed to be the objective of the Soviet outcry:

to convince Germany that Poland was behind the attack and that any aggression would come from Poland.⁶

She continues sarcastically: “Dabei war es die Sowjetunion, die nach einem kleinen erfrischenden Nachbarschaftskrieg strebte und dafür gerüstet war. Ganz im Gegensatz zu Deutschland” ‘For that matter, it was the Soviet Union that desired an invigorating little war between neighbors and seemed to be armed for it, in contrast to Germany’ (154).

The narrator’s new awareness of Soviet aggressiveness toward Poland as early as 1932 worries her more than the fate of her “verrückten Stern” (“crazy Stern,” 154). The main reason is the discovery during her research that her Jewish ancestors came from Poland. For centuries, the religiously tolerant country had sheltered persecuted European Jews. The shock of discovering the Soviet Union’s desire to appropriate parts of Poland and its ensnarement of her great-uncle in a dirty geopolitical game plays an important role in the negotiation of her post-Soviet identity. Included in this exploration is the struggle for new meanings of words and slogans. Moreover, her ironical interpretation of Stern’s possible motivation for shooting at the German diplomat shows how critical she has become of the Soviet Union and of her own identification with it:

When everything is regulated, when everything goes according to the plan, when even five years of industrialization should be done in four years, with the result that everything goes wrong according to plan, then coincidence is a sign. Stern wanted to shoot at somebody to take a stand.⁷

Although Petrowskaja’s narrator certainly does not miss the reality of *Lubjanka*, *Organy*, and five-year plans, the reader can feel a longing for her childhood in Kiev. The alternation between German and Russian shows that her mind is suspended between this nostalgia and her enthusiasm for her new home in Germany. The longing is most visible in her use of Russian expressions, names of streets and newspapers, quotations from poems, idioms, cooking recipes, and allusions to fairy tales.

Babuschka (“grandmother”) is a word that in Andreas-Salomé’s and Petrowskaja’s texts stands for nostalgia and the Russian way of life. To Andreas-Salomé, it means the “Inkarnation des Traditionellen” ‘incarnation of the traditional’ (117). About a certain Kolja, for instance, whom she met in a village in Northern Russia, she states: “Dieser Mann würde im Westen ein Selbstständiger werden, der sich auf Kosten aller Familientradition Raum schafft; hier wird er ein Fortsetzer dessen, was die бабушка (*Babuschka*) seiner бабушка (*Babuschka*) gewollt” ‘This man would become a self-employed businessman in the West who would pursue his ambitions at the expense of family tradition. Here he will carry on what the бабушка (*Babuschka*) of his

бабушка (*Babuschka*) wanted' (117).

In Petrowskaja's text, the word "*Babuschka*" (66) conveys a positive sense of Russian family tradition although, as the narrator learns during her genealogical research, both of her *babushki* spoke Yiddish as their first language. However, the revelation concerning Yiddish does not seem to matter. They were citizens of the Soviet Union and spoke Russian as well. Still feeling an emotional attachment to the Russian language and to the Soviet Union, the narrator states:

We were a Soviet family, Russian and not religious. The Russian language was the proud heritage of all who knew what desperation means in the face of the destiny of our own home—as the poet says: *Only you give me strength and support, o you great, powerful, true and free Russian language*, and today I hear in the words *O you joyful, O you blessed* how we no longer define ourselves through living or dead relatives and their places, but through our languages.⁸

In post-Soviet times, much has changed, insofar as dead relatives and the places associated with them and, therefore, Poland and the Lubyanka have become places of interest. One relative is the narrator's Ukrainian "*deduschka*" ("grandfather," 225) who, as a Soviet prisoner of war, suffered in the Nazi concentration camp at Mauthausen. After World War II, he again had to suffer hardship in the Soviet Union, being ostracized and punished because he had been a prisoner of war. Consequently, he grew taciturn, saying not much more than *da oder chorascho* ("yes" or "good," 229).

One mixture of German and Russian refers to Lenin and demonstrates that though the narrator questions many of the Soviet ideological paradigms that she once had believed, she still feels positively about the Soviet revolution. A good example is when she states, without irony, that "*Deduschka Lenin*" (35) was a grandfather to all Soviet children, including herself.

Border crossing in the lives of Andreas-Salomé and Petrowskaja implies dynamics, flux, and change. The existential uprootedness in their first-person narrations triggers the need to renegotiate their identity. As part of this process, they must cross borders linguistically. Their use of snippets of the Russian language in the German texts shows their high degree of sensitivity to the implications and consequences that follow from the choice and use of language.

In addition, Petrowskaja's text includes metafictional dimensions that reflect on the functions of narration and on multilingualism. An important example is a description of the narrator in a Berlin station as she waits for a train to Warsaw. She talks to a foreigner, an old man who is confused by a huge advertisement that states in capital letters: "BOMBARDIER WILLKOMMEN IN BERLIN" 'Bombardier Welcome to Berlin' (7). It is a wel-

come that connotes something *Gnadenlose[s]* (“pitiless,” 8). The man contemplating the sign is a Jew from Teheran who is traveling to the Polish village where his ancestors lived before the Holocaust annihilated most of them. He associates German aggression during World War II with the word “Bombardier” and feels figuratively “bombarded” by the word’s capital letters. The narrator is also confused about this word; however, she has seen the sign so often that she has become accustomed to it: “Ich bin zu oft hier, dachte ich kurz, vielleicht bin ich стрелоцник, *strelotschnik*, ein Weichensteller, und immer ist der Weichensteller schuld, aber nur auf Russisch . . .” ‘I am here too often, I thought for a moment, perhaps I am a стрелоцник, *strelotschnik*, a switchman, and it is always the switchman’s fault, but only in Russian . . .’ (8). The railroad term “switchman,” which she highlights by writing it in both Cyrillic and Latin characters, is used metaphorically. To calm the old man, she tells him that *Bombardier* is a popular French musical playing at one of Berlin’s theaters and attracting many visitors from abroad. After a newspaper had complained about the advertisement causing false associations, linguists were consulted who analyzed the word for its possible *Gewaltpotential* ‘potential for violence’ (9). A court finally decided that the advertisement could remain; she explains that it is “zu Gunsten der freien Werbung” ‘in the name of free speech’ (9). Although she is clueless about the meaning of the word “Bombardier” and fabricated the explanation because it “beflügelte [sie]” ‘gave her wings’ (9), she decides not to call it a lie. The narrator further elaborates her story about the musical and the lawsuit which, in the end, completely falsifies how language and meaning relate to truth. She does so “ohne die geringste Angst abzustürzen” ‘without the slightest fear of falling from the tightrope’ (9). At this moment, she is truly a “стрелоцник, *strelotschnik*” (8). She negotiates between the man whose Jewish ancestors had been victims of German belligerence and the country where he finds himself now.

To her satisfaction, the man is convinced by her phony explanation. Again, Petrowskaja’s narrator needs Russian, because the term “стрелоцник, *strelotschnik*” has the power and spectrum of meaning to explain her life’s role and her *Weltanschauung* as a writer. She wants to placate people and foster peace by moderating confusion and pain. Metaphorically speaking, she accomplishes this by “working the switches.” In the subsequent dialogue between her and the man from Teheran, they find common ground in discussing their genealogical research before they travel eastward on the train. By crossing borders, Petrowskaja not only connects Middle and Eastern Europe geographically but also culturally, by means of the multilingualism in her novel—as Andreas-Salomé tried to do a century before.

Multilingualism in Petrowskaja’s text also relates to intertextuality. The narrator uses her native language for quoting from Russian poems and

fairy tales. Two examples illustrate this practice. Walking through the Austrian landscape on the way to Mauthausen, where her grandfather was held as a prisoner of war until 1945, the narrator states:

I walk, with measured steps as you write poems, following an inner rhythm, because all Russian poems about the path are written in iambs with five stresses, *Vj-keho-zhu-o-din-ya-na-do-rogu* / Alone, I set out on the road”.⁹

The Russian words that accompany her on her way to the concentration camp, now a museum, are those of a verse taken from a well-known poem by Mikhail Lermontov, “I Go Out on the Road Alone.”

A second example of intertextuality refers to both a Russian idiom and a fairy tale; it connects them to Greek mythology. Petrowskaja’s narrator remembers the story of Achilles’s heel, which her mother read to her as a child. Fear grips her when Achilles’s mother, Thetis, holds the baby’s heel as she dips his body into the magical water of the river Styx, which protects a person from injury. The narrator remembers that, as a child, it affected her so strongly “dass meine Seele in die Fersen rutschte, wie man auf Russisch sagt, wenn man von Furcht ergriffen wird” ‘that my soul slid into my heels, as you say in Russian when you are gripped by fear’ (215). She recalls that she could not move and was almost unable to breathe, because she knew that the heel Achilles’s mother was holding represented something “Unabwendbares . . . , etwas Verhängnisvolles ‘unavoidable . . . , doom’ (215). Simultaneously, she thinks about the magician in the fairy tale “Конец Бессмертный, Kostschej Bessmertnyj, Kostschej der Unsterbliche” (215). This Russian hero was mortal; however, his death was hiding in the tip of a needle, the needle in an egg, the egg in a duck, the duck in an oak tree, and the oak tree on an island, of which was said, “niemand wusste, wo sie ist” ‘no one knew where it was’ (215). Connecting this memory to her recollection of Achilles’s heel story and its corresponding meaning of vulnerable mortality, she exclaims, “Und hier—eine nackte Ferse!” ‘And here—a bare heel!’ (215). These references reveal how the story of the narrator’s search for her dead relatives, a quest that fills her with fear, is written over older texts—a poem by Lermontov, a Russian idiom, and a fairy tale—all of which resonate with each other in Petrowskaja’s German-language narrative.

With regard to multilingualism, Gerald Gillespie has noted that an anthology of any major Western literature reveals its historical participation in a variety of linguistic crossings and borrowings. Examples are epigraphs given in the original foreign languages or allusions to passages “that are tacitly carried over into the respective native languages” (52). Such allusions, Gillespie goes on to say, “constitute the largest reservoir of materials, since most Western literature seems to be palimpsestial” (52). As the intertextual

references to Lermontov's poem and the orally transmitted Russian fairy tale exemplify, Petrowskaja in *Vielleicht Esther* is testing whether Eastern European languages and literatures could not also be included in this large collection of materials, and she decides the question in the affirmative. To determine how well Russian blends in this process of intermixing, she spells some words according to the Cyrillic, others according to the Latin alphabet. This multilingual undertaking is part of what Brigid Haines calls "the Eastern European turn in contemporary German-language literature" (145). According to her, it does not simply "denote a new wave of immigrant writers [who come from Eastern Europe and write in German]"; instead, it designates "also a conceptual stocktaking of the present, post-'Wende' European moment from a variety of perspectives" (147). The most renowned among these writers are Wladimir Kaminer, Ilja Trojanow, and Saša Stanišič. The very act of telling their stories allows these authors to engage creatively with intertextual references to Eastern European literatures and popular cultures. However, *Vielleicht Esther* presents something new because, within the context of a thematic relationship between languages and the writer's transnational identity, the author transforms multilingualism into an instrument of palpably dramatic personal expression.

From historically different starting points, Lou Andreas-Salomé and Katja Petrowskaja describe journeys eastward. Travel allows them to revisit their childhood places or investigate family history. Their shared practice of intermixing German with Russian reveals multiple perspectives that are attached to both languages. These writers value switching into Russian and use the technique to express their nostalgia for the Russian language of their childhoods. In Petrowskaja's more recent text, Russian expressions are also used to articulate traumatizing experiences and repressed events of the past that come to light during the narrator's genealogical research. If *Vielleicht Esther* had been written monolingually, suppressed episodes associated with the Holocaust and with anti-Semitism in general would have probably remained buried. By deliberately switching from one language to another, Petrowskaja expands Andreas-Salomé's use of emotionally laden multilingualism and Nietzschean gesture. She successfully creates metaliterary reflections of the unsolid interior space that is identity between languages.

Notes

¹ Having provided English equivalents to the titles, the essay will subsequently refer to these works with their original German designations. At this writing and to my knowledge, no English translations of the works exist. All translations are mine.

² Hedwig Courths-Mahler (1867-1950) was a prolific German writer of light fiction.

³ Lubyanka (Lubyanka) is the popular name for the KJB headquarters in Moscow.

⁴ “Jedesmal, wenn ich an die Lubyanka dachte, Gefängnis und Folterzentrale, wo auch Judas Stern verschwunden war, dachte ich an Organe. Wir haben diese Behörde immer als Organy bezeichnet, er arbeitet in den inneren Organen, hieß es, und damit hatten sie Macht über unser Inneres, oder man sagte einfach *Er arbeitet in den Organen*, als gäbe es einen Organismus, der uns alle verschluckt hat” (149).

⁵ “Mein Großonkel zielte direkt auf das Sonnengeflecht der Zeit. Denn er, dieser sowjetische Attentäter namens Judas Stern, schoss eine Woche vor den Reichspräsidentenwahlen auf einen deutschen Diplomaten in Moskau. Es war das letzte Jahr vor Hitler und das erste Jahr der Hungersnot in der Sowjetunion, zwei Länder, die sich in einem Bündnis gegenseitig in Richtung Wahnsinn trieben. Und dann feuerte mein Stern” (146).

⁶ “Pilsudski hat den Attentäter Stern gedungen,’ stand in der *Roten Fabne*, ohne jegliche Beweise, und von Dirksen bat die Korrespondenten der deutschen Zeitungen, Polen auf keinen Fall als mögliche Quelle des Attentats zu nennen. Doch genau dies schien das Hauptziel des sowjetischen Aufschreis: Deutschland davon zu überzeugen, dass Polen hinter dem Attentat stecke und die Aggression aus Polen komme” (154). Józef Pilsudski (1867-1935) was Polish Chief of State from 1918 to 1922 and again from 1925 to 1935. He is regarded as one of the fathers of the modern Polish nation. Herbert von Dirksen (1882-1955) was the chargé d’affaires at the German embassy in Warsaw (1920-1921), German consul in Danzig (1923-1925), and Germany’s ambassador to the Soviet Union (1928-1933). At the time, *Rote Fabne* (“Red Flag”), founded in 1918, was the weekly magazine of the Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany.

⁷ “Wenn alles geregelt ist, wenn alles nach Plan läuft, wenn sogar fünf Jahre Industrialisierung in vier erledigt werden sollen, so dass hier im Lande alles nach Plan schiefeht, dann ist der Zufall ein Zeichen, Stern wollte auf irgendjemanden schießen, ein Zeichen setzen” (166).

⁸ “Wir waren eine sowjetische Familie, russisch und nicht religiös, das Russische war das stolze Erbe aller, die wussten, was Verzweiflung ist, angesichts des Schicksals der eigenen Heimat, wie der Dichter sagt, *Nur du*

gibst mir Stütze und Halt, o du große, mächtige, wahrheitsgetreue und freie russische Sprache, und heute höre ich in diesen Worten o du fröhliche, o du selige, wir bestimmten uns nicht mehr durch die lebenden und die toten Verwandten und ihre Orte, sondern durch unsere Sprachen” (78). “O du fröhliche, o du selige, gnadenbringende Weihnachtszeit!” ‘O you joyful, O you blessed grace-bringing Christmas time!’ is one of the best known German Christmas songs.

⁹ “Ich gehe zu Fuß, gemessenen Schrittes, wie man Gedichte schreibt, einem inneren Rhythmus folgend, denn alle russischen Gedichte über den Weg sind in fünfhebigen Jamben geschrieben, *У-кхо-збу-о-дин-я-на-до-рогу* / Einsam geh’ ich auf dem Weg” (243).

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